



Al-Risala 1993

October

Airing suspicions

After the Battle of Hunayn (8AH) the Prophet distributed the spoils of battle in the valley of Ji'ranah, about ten miles from Mecca. Abdallah Amr ibn al-Aas witnessed the scene. One incident that occurred during the distribution of spoils was thus described by him:

A man called Dhu'l-Khuwaysirah of the Banu Tamim came and stood next to the Prophet as he was giving things away. "I have seen your day's work, Muhammad," he said to the Prophet. "Indeed," the Prophet replied, "and how did you find it?" "You do not appear to have been just," was Dhu'l-Khuwaysirah's response (Ibn Hisham, *Sirah*.)

A similar incident occurred during the caliphate of Umar, when Uaynah ibn Hisan came to Medina, where he stayed with his nephew, Hur ibn Qays. Having obtained permission for a meeting with the Caliph, he came before him and said:

By God, son of Khattab, you do not bestow any wealth upon us, nor do you pass judgement justly among us. (*Riyadh as-Salihin*).

Both these allegations were unfounded. Yet, despite this, words were found with which to accuse the Prophet and 'Umar, both of whom were innocent of the accusations levelled against them. This shows that the levelling of accusations is not enough to prove a person guilty. There is nothing on earth which will stop people bringing charges, no matter whether they are true or false. It is only when God's judgement comes to pass that people will feel constrained to stop uttering falsehoods, and that justice will be done to all.

A common human weakness

The progeny of the Prophet Abraham later split up into two branches, one known as the children of Israel, the second as the Children of Ishmael. All the prophets up to Jesus were descendants of the Children of Israel. After Jesus, when the final Prophet Muhammad, a descendant of the Children of Ishmael, made his appearance, the Children of Israel refused to believe in him. Commenting on the Jews' lack of belief, the Qur'an says that it was because of "Jealousy of what God has granted certain people of His bounty" (4:54). Jealousy is a common weakness of human character. This verse of the Qur'an shows that it appears when one human being is loath to accept the superiority of another.

Generally, no one takes notice when some charge is brought against an insignificant person, of no standing in society; it is only when someone of note is charged with misconduct that people's attention is aroused. Without looking into the authenticity of what is being said, they accept without questioning the truth of every adverse comment concerning those who excel them in some way. One has no trouble making people believe stories about the wicked ways in which a person has accumulated wealth, or the dishonourable conduct of one who has reached a respectable position in society. If one concocts scandalous stories concerning those in authority, people will immediately take note of what one says: their authority will be undermined; while by bringing them into disrepute, one will oneself become a focus of attraction and popularity.

The reason for this is that man's greatest weakness is his reluctance to accept the superiority of another. He does not wish to see anyone save himself in a position of prominence. Consequently, those who stand out from others in a society become the target of jealousy – either open or concealed – on the part of their fellows. Everyone would like to see them robbed of their position. So when a person says something which achieves this end, people take his words to heart, using them as ammunition to fire against one whose superiority they were so loath to accept.

While in this world, people take great relish in this pastime. But in fact they are following in footsteps of Satan, who was cursed because of his refusal to accept the superiority of Adam over himself. Those who refuse to accept the superiority of another will soon learn that their own fate is no different from that of Satan, their precursor.

How saint-worship gradually turns into idol-worship

Several idols which were worshipped by Noah's people—Wud, Suwa, Yaghuth, Yauq and Nasr—are mentioned in the Quran. Ibn Jareer al Tabari has related a tradition on the authority of Mohammad Ibn Qays to the effect that these idols were named after certain saints of ancient times. These were pious men who had lived in the period between Adam and Noah. They had many followers in their lifetime, and when they died these followers said if they were to construct images of their heroes, it would inspire them in their worship of God. They then proceeded to do so. When the next generation made its appearance, Satan introduced another idea: that their forefathers had not just been using these statues as a focus of worship – they had actually been worshipping them as idols. It was these idols who made the rain fall and, in fact, accomplished everything. That was how idol worship started.

(Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir*)

The human personality

If from a vessel containing water a single drop is found to be brackish, it means that all of the liquid is undrinkable. We need sample of only one drop to know with certainty what the rest will be like. Much the same is true of the human personality. It is like an overbrimming vessel which keeps on shedding drops for other people to savour, to find sweet or brackish as the case may be. Small instances of an individual's behaviour and quite short interludes in his company are generally sufficient to tell us what his overall personality is like - unless we are dealing with the greatest of dissemblers! A thoughtless remark, an unfair manoeuvre, a failure to give much-needed sympathy or support, a devious transaction – all these are the plain indicators, like those brackish drops of water from the larger vessel, which indicate the lack of integrity or callousness of the person you are dealing with.

The human personality has the same homogeneity as water. A single human weakness cannot therefore be considered in isolation, as if it were an exception. It has to be looked upon as being representative of the entire personality. If an individual proves unreliable in one matter, he is likely to evince the same unreliability in other matters; if he is guilty of untrustworthiness on one occasion, the chances are that this trait will show up time and time again. There is only one kind of person who is an exception to that rule, and that is the one who subjects his own behaviour to constant re-appraisal, who is continually scrutinizing himself for weaknesses and faults and who, once having found such faults, wastes no time in rooting them out.

A man who has made a mistake can completely erase the marks of what is an unfortunate experience for others by admitting his mistake and begging forgiveness. Some people are pricked by their consciences, but do nothing to assuage the ruffled feelings of others, thinking that to do so would be sheer weakness and would mean a loss of face. Such people can never have healthy social relationships and can never win the respect of their fellow men. They do not realize that a man displays his true mettle when he sees his own wrong actions for what they are, and humbly asks forgiveness.

It is only he who has learned the art of moral introspection who will in the long run, prove himself a person of inviolable integrity.

No turning back on the decision of the Prophet

During his last days on this earth, the Prophet dispatched against the Romans an army of 3,000 men, amongst whom were some of the leading Companions. Usama ibn Zayd-a relatively young man-was appointed to command the force. At the time of the Prophet's death, when Abu Bakr became Caliph, the army commanded by Usama was still on its way. Assessing the new situation, he felt that the need of the hour was to combat the renegades who were now posing a threat to Medina, so he asked Umar ibn al-Khattab to go to the Caliph, Abu Bakr, and seek his permission for the army to return to Medina. Abu Bakr's response was: "Even if dogs and wolves come to devour me, I am still not going to change an order given by the Prophet himself." Umar then repeated the rest of his message: "The Medinans asked me to convey to you that they want a commander who is older than Usama." Abu Bakr, who had been seated at the time, jumped up at these words and caught hold of Umar's beard. "Son of al-Khattab," he addressed him, "May your mother be rid of you! The Prophet himself appointed Zayd. How dare you tell me to displace him!"

(Al-Bidayah wa al-Nihayah)

God, prophethood and life after death

The world we live in is a material one in which symbols, richly representative of life's realities, have been given a concrete form. Those who are sincere in their search for truth, and who look deeply into things, will recognize their significance, thus finding for themselves such a great diversity of proofs of God's existence as will fully satisfy their intellectual curiosity and silence their skepticism. What started out as tentative beliefs will thus be given the solid grounding of unshakable conviction.

A likeness of God

A Likeness of God is to be found in man, for is not the existence of man a proof of the existence of God? What is the nature of God? He is a live, self-sufficient Being, with a mind that is all-knowing, eyes that are all-seeing and ears that are all-hearing. His power is of such infinitude that it reaches to the furthestmost corners of the universe, and no object of His will is too great or too small to escape its force. And quite independent of all objects of creation, God has His ego.

Man may not, like God, be omniscient and omnipotent, but he certainly thinks, sees, hears, has a will, acts of his own volition and understands quite precisely what is meant by the 'ego – the 'I'. To believe in God is to have faith in a higher form of the 'I'. Man's experience of himself, his attributes, his characteristics, make it possible for him to apprehend the eternal Being who possesses these very attributes and characteristics, but to a superlative degree. This is the Being whom we call God, or Allah.

If one is sure of one's own existence, why should one not be sure of the existence of God? Here am 'I', sitting in one place, observing the universe. Why, then, should there not be a Being greater than I am, situated elsewhere in the universe, watching over it? We ourselves direct the movements of machines in outer space by means of remote control, so why should we have any difficulty in accepting that there is a God who controls the universe by His own invisible system? Man metes out punishments and gives rewards according to his own concept of justice, so why should there not be an all-powerful God who administers reward and retribution according to his own, unique concept of justice?

Indeed, believing in God is no different from believing in one's own self. It is no more difficult for man to accept the existence of God than it is for him to accept his own existence. Belief in God is doubtless an extraordinary feat of the imagination, but it is no more extraordinary than believing in man. Once one has accepted one such extraordinary phenomenon, what is there to prevent one from accepting another?

A likeness of prophethood

"This is London. Here is the latest news." These words are uttered by a newsreader sitting far away from us in London. We cannot hear him directly, but the moment we switch on our radio sets, his voice comes over so loud and clear that the distance between the broadcasting station and our home seems to have shrunk to nothing.

This purely physical phenomenon gives us an idea of what prophethood is like. In the way of the radio set, the prophet provides a link between us and God's 'broadcasting station'. Just as a radio or transistor picks up news and programmes from the broadcasting station, the prophet 'picks up' words coming from God Himself and relays them to us in exactly the form that they left God's lips, without addition, subtraction or changes of any kind.

But for the prophets – the living radio sets between man and God – we should not be able to hear the words of God, just as we should not be able to hear programmes from far off radio stations, without the aid of the radio. So prized are radios and transistors for the information and entertainment that they bring to people that there is hardly a home throughout the entire world which is without one or the other. How wonderful it would be then if people were to realize the importance of divine 'broadcasts', and were to listen to the prophets with the same rapt attention that they give to their radios. They would then begin to be influenced by them and would follow them heart and soul. The functioning of prophethood is not any more difficult to understand than the workings of a radio. While the latter is powered by electricity, prophethood functions on the basis of sheer divine inspiration.

A likeness of life after death

People sit in a room conversing with each other. They are conscious of what is visible, audible, tangible. The world is before them, to be apprehended through the senses. They feel that they know everything about it that is humanly possible to know, and do not suspect that another world might exist in their midst – of which they know nothing.

Just then, someone switches on the television, suddenly a different and hitherto unseen 'world' appears on its screen. Darting figures, a hubbub of voices, rows of houses, mountain scenery – all kinds of visual and auditory phenomena make their impact upon the senses of the viewers.

The experience of television is an earthly analogy of the concept of life after death – a world beyond our world, just as complete in every detail as the one before us. It shows how another world can exist within the present world, yet remain out with the range of normal human sensitivity unless we are attuned to it. The world shown on television is already present before us, but it only becomes visible when the set is switched on. In like manner, the world of the hereafter is already omnipresent, but it will only impinge on the senses when it is 'switched on' for us by God.

In the realm of science, concepts are very often demonstrated and understood by means of models. Our present world is like a natural model, by means of which we can understand supernatural realities. Our world is, in away, a reflection of them. If one seriously contemplates the world around one, one will find in it the answer to everything.

God, divine revelation and life after death are concepts which man cannot grasp with his present limited vision. They lie in the unseen world. But, it should be remembered that there are many things in this very world, which cannot be seen with the naked eye. In fact, all higher realities are of this nature, and these are accepted solely on the basis of scientific 'clues'. The same applies to God divine revelation and life after death. True, these things cannot be seen with our present sight, but there are clear indications throughout the universe which provide convincing proofs of their actuality. There can be no doubt about their existence. If we think seriously about them, we have no choice but to accept them.

Lose all, gain all

The first Caliph, Abu Bakr, sent out Khalid ibn Walid on a military campaign. One of the pieces of advice he gave him was: "Desire death you will be granted life."

Such is man

In the present age, man is at once extremely keen-sighted and almost totally blind. How are we to explain such a paradox? It is quite simple. When attention has to be focussed on the faults of others, his keen-sightedness is very much in evidence. But when he has to look at his own shortcomings, his blindness is more than apparent.

The most common enigma in the world of today is man's readiness to take others to task while refusing to take stock of his own shortcomings. It would appear to make no difference that some are religious and some are not; that some bear aloft the standard of Islam and some that of anti-Islam, for their common denominator remains the same: all have a better insight than is called for into the failings of others, while lacking any basic perception of their own.

Why is it that people are so fond of alluding to others' mistakes? It is because, in so doing, they give a boost to their own egos, and lull themselves into a state of complacency. They feel that their 'goodness' is thrown into sharp relief by the badness of others, and once having dubbed others blameworthy, in some strange way, they feel themselves entirely blameless.

People fail to realize that their own inadequacies should be their prime concern – not those of others. The only time they feel concerned with themselves is when their comforts, convenience, safety, etc, are threatened. Then they make strenuous efforts to see that these aspects of their lives should never be prejudiced in any way. But just as a hungry man thinks first and foremost of his own hunger, so should a moral, social being think first and foremost of his own conduct, and not of his own convenience, or of the faults of others. It will only be when the Day of Judgement is upon us and the Truth made plain, that this realization will come to man.

Today, hell-fire seems remote and that is why man feels that he can vent his fury upon others with impunity. But on the Day of Judgement this fury will be turned back upon himself, and he will find himself standing before a blazing inferno. All that will matter to him then will be how to gain redemption for his sins – how to be saved from the Fire of Hell. It is only the truly moral man who sees that day coming now and, before it actually arrives, begins to make a thorough self-appraisal.

Here's an idea

It happened once that in the time of the Prophet Muhammad, may peace be upon him, a group of people came from Medina to Mecca in order to enter into some agreement with the Quraysh. The group included the Chieftain of Medina, Abu al-Haytham, and one Ayaz ibn Mu'adh. On hearing of their arrival, the Prophet lost no time in approaching them and inviting them to accept Islam. Ayaz ibn Mu'adh was so impressed by the teachings of Islam that he exclaimed, "My people, this is indeed much better than what we came for!"

Nowadays, people who are seeking better livelihoods for themselves are flocking in their thousands to the Arab world. What better opportunity could there be than this for their Muslim hosts to do as the Prophet and his Companions did to communicate the message of Islam. No matter what worldly openings these expatriates may be seeking for themselves, they cannot remain forever deaf to the exhortations of those around them to accept the tenets of the Muslim faith. The point is that Muslims should recognize this as a golden opportunity and avail of it without delay.

Quiet, solid, organized efforts should be made in this direction in the Arab world today on lines which have already been laid down by the Prophet. Foreigners flocking to Arab shores should be told, 'You know, we have something better here than what you came for – the spiritual wealth of Islam which will ensure your well-being in the life after death. The petro-dollars which you have come for may improve your standard of living in today's world, but the Islam which you could take away with you would make you successful for all time.'

People like Ayaz Ibn Mu'adh would then surely appear on the scene to pass on the message of Islam to their own people; and those people would in turn realize that the spiritual wealth of Islam is indeed much more valuable and worthwhile than the material wealth for which they had come. Even now, many westerners living in the Arab world are accepting Islam. The usual pattern they follow is to begin by learning the Arabic language and acquainting themselves with Arab customs and religion in order to be better qualified to work there. Then a certain inquisitiveness begins to grow and they ask their Arab hosts about Islam.

Some of them like what they hear and feel inclined, on their own initiative, to enter the fold of Islam. Without any urging on the part of the Muslims around them. But just think of the greatly increased numbers of converts there could be if Muslims were to make all-out, energetic but tactful efforts to communicate to their visitors the message of Islam.

Death and the beginning of a new life

Of all moments that lie within the realm of human imagination and beyond, death is the most savage. All the other calamities that cause man distress are nothing compared to that which he will encounter in the form of death.

With death we enter the most difficult stage of our lives. We become totally powerless, destitute and helpless. All worldly suffering has a limit, but, in the world that we shall enter after death, suffering and torment will be unlimited.

In reality, this is the state of man in the present world. So inherently weak is man that he cannot bear even the slightest inconvenience. Just the prick of a needle, a day's hunger and thirst, or a few nights' insomnia, are enough to rock his entire being. In this world, however, he has everything he needs. That is why he forgets his indigence, and remains blind to his own true nature.

In this world man has food and water, air and light; he is able to tame the forces of nature and bring civilization into existence. But if this world were taken away from him, he would not be able to fashion another world of this kind anywhere in the universe. It would be his lot to wander around in darkness.

The worldly affliction which causes man distress on earth is trivial compared to the affliction of the hereafter. Worldly honour and ease make him proud and complacent, but they are of no consequence if they do not remain with him in the next, eternal life. If man were conscious of what was to become of him after death, he would forget about his worldly state, and concentrate on consolidating his position in a world where both repose and torment are infinite.

Death is not the end of life: it is the beginning of a new stage of life. It will lead some into a den of unmitigated hardship, and others to a world of infinite happiness.

The sign of a true believer

People, looking at objects, become entangled in mere things and so stop right there. The true believer, however, is one who passes beyond things and reaches God.

A fruit falling from a tree is an event that everyone has witnessed. But one who has seen in this phenomenon the force of gravity is an Issac Newton. Matter has been observed by everyone, but one who has seen in matter the motion of electrons is a Michael Faraday. Particles are everywhere and can be seen by everyone, but one who has seen nuclear energy within them is an Albert Einstein. In like manner, everyone has seen the world, but the one who sees God in it – he is the true believer.

A parallel example is to be found in the New Testament: “He that hath ears to hear, let him hear. But whereunto shall I liken this generation? It is like unto children sitting in the markets, and calling unto their fellows, and saying, we have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented (Matthew; 11:15-17).

The ‘piping’ of God in this world, which perennially goes on, is for man to listen to and become thrilled, to begin dancing to and become happy. But the very sound of God’s piping leaves man unmoved and ignorant. God makes things manifest in this world such as man should gaze on and tremble; on beholding them, his eyes should fill with tears. Yet so great is the contumacy of man that matters of earth-shattering import do not make him shudder; events of the greatest poignancy do not serve to bring tears to his eyes.

What is required of man is that he should acknowledge the divinity of God. But man is not ready to do this. Today, man can extricate himself from the worst of dilemmas by the mere uttering of a word, but there will come a day when he will not be able to escape, even if he offers the whole world as ransom. Consider the difference between man’s condition today and the state in which he will find himself tomorrow. And tomorrow is nearer than we think.

Reason of deception

The Qur'an makes it clear that a prophet invariably adopts the standpoint of *bayyinah*, that is, reason. By contrast, his opponents have nothing on which to base their arguments save blind opposition and deception. While a prophet's words are based on facts, his opponents utterances are founded on egoism and contumacy.

In the present world, a distinction must be made between the upholders of truth and the perpetrators of falsehood. A prophet is unequivocally a representative of divine truth, and we can take it that every single word he utters is based on this truth. All of his statements are based on the knowledge he has received from God, and that is why the entire universe confirms their truth. His opponents' statements, on the other hand, stem, solely from self-oriented desire and self-interest. It is for this reason that neither learning nor intellect will support what they have to say.

The present world being God's testing-ground for humanity, every man on earth is free to act as he pleases. If an individual wishes to speak the truth, the words come to him with ease. Even if he wishes to tell lies, he has no difficulty in finding the words to do so. In neither case will he be impeded by grammar or vocabulary.

This ease and freedom, however, are limited solely to the present world and in the next world they will be non-existent. Deprived of his glibness and volubility, the deceiver will be unable to find even the smallest syllable with which to utter a lie. There will be no way whatsoever that he will be able to pass off deceit as sincerity, or cruel behaviour as justice.

In today's world, it pays to lie. Deceit and intrigue can place one in the highest of positions. This state of affairs is wholly transitory, and when death takes its toll, all such machinations will be exposed from top to bottom for the false actions that they are. After death, when man enters the Hereafter, he will suddenly find himself utterly helpless. The ground on which he had previously stood will have vanished from beneath his feet, and, finding himself with nothing on which to stand, he will fall headlong through space to his eternal doom.

Today's world is a world which stands upon lies. The world of the hereafter will be a world which stands upon truth.

17 October 1993

Reject reproof and you reject what is good

Adi ibn Hatim once said: "What is acceptable to you today, was abhorrent to us yesterday; and what is abhorrent to you now will become acceptable to future generations. You will be following the true path so long as you continue to recognize what is abhorrent and refrain from rejecting what is acceptable; and so long as a learned man can stand up amongst you to admonish you without having scorn heaped on his head."

(Ibn 'Asakir)

The secret of success

Eighty per cent of the information received by a human being from the outside world comes to him through his eyes – *provided he keeps his eyes open*. There is an abundance of oxygen in the air, but if it is to do him any good, *he must assiduously breathe it in*. If, however, we are to benefit from our environment, it means rather more than just depending upon our own spontaneous biological functioning. It means that we must have the will and ability to seize the opportunities given to us by God and to learn to grapple with whatever their built-in conditions may be. We cannot expect the world—of its own—to lay its gifts at our feet.

This concept is of the greatest importance in the sphere of *da'wah* work. The spreading of the Islamic message is not something which is going to happen automatically, and, if it is to come about, it will depend upon our grasping whatever opportunities come our way. In modern times the greatest opportunity that has presented itself is the widespread freedom of belief enjoyed allover the world. This freedom, however, carries with it a tacit proviso, i.e. that propagation of the faith must not take place by coercion, but by gentle persuasion. One reason for this is that so long as one does not use force, there will be no serious opposition to such activity. Perhaps a more important reason is that everyone should enjoy the same freedom of belief; the forcing of beliefs upon others is tantamount to encroaching upon that freedom, nay, destroying it. Failure to respect this condition means misusing the opportunity which presents itself; *da'wah* activity carried on in this way would eventually prove counterproductive. After such an abuse of another's privilege, there would be nothing to stand between us and God's punishment, for it is He who has provided us with this unique opportunity to bring other people within the fold. It is an opportunity to be seized, not wasted.

Missed opportunities spell ruin. That is the way of the world. And that is the will of God.

The plight of man

The foundations of western civilization were laid in the unrestricted freedom of permissiveness. This so-called civilization spread its tentacles throughout world until there was no one, neither rich nor poor, literate or illiterate, who was not affected by it. Today, this situation has reached its moral nadir, leaving human beings all over the world bereft of any vestige of humanity. Man today is bent upon just two things—the satisfaction of his own desires and the settlement of all affairs to his own advantage. What he wants and what will benefit him are of paramount importance, and there is nothing that he will stop short of to gain them.

That taint of modern civilization has been more in evidence in those countries collectively known as the sub-continent of India than anywhere else—to the point, in fact, where the nation of this geographical grouping have been transformed into a jungle of insensitive beasts. For a serious-minded human being, living in these countries is like living in Hell.

Today, we perforce live among people who thrive on evil and take pleasure in injustice. They do not hesitate to act unscrupulously, and then rejoice in their successes. People are no longer satisfied with living off their legitimate earnings. It is only when they have plundered others, seizing their wealth and property that they feel satisfied.

People today have reached a stage where they take no pleasure in speaking the truth; rather it is the making of false accusations which leaves a sweet taste upon their tongues. Far from obtaining gratification by acknowledging the status of others, they delight in refusing others the respect due to them. Dishonouring the honourable and disgracing those who have been graced by God – that is what affords them satisfaction. The world of today is inhabited by people whose lives are based on fabric of lies, but it is only those whose lives are based on truth who will find a niche in the everlasting world of the hereafter. Those who have gained their successes on the basis of false statements will find, at the crucial hour, that there will be nothing whatsoever, and no one whosoever to come to their rescue.

The heart and the tongue: of all things the best and the worst

Luqman the Wise, an Abyssynian slave, was once asked by his master to slaughter a goat and bring him two pieces of its best meat. Luqman did as he was bid, then cooked the goat and brought his master its tongue and heart. A few days later, his master asked him to slaughter another goat and, this time, bring him two pieces of its worst meat. Luqman again did as he was bid, but presented his master with the same two parts of the animal – its tongue and its heart. His master then inquired as to why it was that he had brought him the same parts on both occasions. “If both these parts are sound,” replied Luqman, “then there is nothing to compare with them. But if they are both defective, there is nothing worse.”

Adding insult to injury

On January 12, 1987, a mob of students from *deeni madarsas* (religious schools) in Peshawar, Pakistan, attacked the offices of the *Frontier Post*, a local newspaper causing extensive damage to them. Their action was in protest against the reproduction of a painting of Adam and Eve by the German artist, Lucas Cranach in the newspaper's Friday magazine of January 9, 1987. The raid was carried out at the instigation of their leaders, who had taken it upon themselves to make fiery speeches on the subject. After congregational prayers the following Friday, they also held a rally in which they described the attack on the newspaper's offices as "correct and timely", and "congratulated those who performed their religious duty by attacking the newspaper's offices."

Justification of such action and congratulation of its perpetrators only adds insult to injury, for neither the action itself nor the teachers' approbation of it is inspired by true Islamic principles. In such matters, there is one hard and fast rule, which the Qur'an sets forth thus: "Let evil be rewarded with like evil" (42:40). In another chapter, it is written: "If you punish, let your punishment be commensurate with the wrong that has been done you" (16: 126).

With such guidelines as are laid down in the *Shariah*, the maximum these Muslim youngsters were entitled to do was write letters to or articles for the newspaper in order to express their disapproval. Using proofs from the Qur'an and Hadith to back up their arguments, they should have simply pointed out why the picture was objectionable in terms of the *Shariah*. After all, burning offices and holding protest rallies are hardly in consonance with true Islamic practice.

Let us go back to the time of the Prophet and see how he and his Companions reacted to the anti-Islamic slogans raised by his opponents. Never on once did they adopt the tactics of arson and vandalism. Rather, they countered attacks on Islam with reasoned arguments. On this point, an eminent Companion, Hassan bin Thabit, is especially noteworthy. He was a poet, and in ancient Arabia, poetry occupied much the same position as the newspapers of today. Poetry was, so to speak, the ancient equivalent of journalism. What Hassan bin Thabit did was to write poems to rebut the opponents of Islam. People then learnt these poems from one another and, in this way, their message spread far and wide. Many such poems, written during the life of the Prophet have been recorded by Ibn Hisham.

If the Muslim students had sincerely wished to perform their religious duty, they should have written articles expressing their disapproval of the publication of such a picture, just as Hassan bin Thabit composed poems in the time of the Prophet to counter the adversaries of Islam. In burning office equipment and premises, the students were not so much doing their religious duty as demonstrating

their *inability* to do so. Incapable of writing a scathing article in the newspapers, they resorted instead to arson and vandalism. Where the situation called for a constructive attitude, theirs was destructive. This is little better than heaping the blame on others for one's own incompetence. Such a reaction is essentially unislamic in that it is vicious in the extreme.

When one looks at such incidents solely from the point of view of the *Shari'ah*, one has first to determine whether an offence has actually been committed. Even supposing that one has been committed, the public is not entitled to take the law into its own hands. It is the courts and law-enforcing agencies which must mete out punishment as a matter of duty; it is not the responsibility of the public at large. Even if the judicial authorities decided that punishment were in order, it would not be the building and equipment which would be singled out for punishment, but the individual who was the actual culprit.

Whether we look at the matter from the everyday, commonsense standpoint, or whether we see it in terms of the *Shari'ah*, we have to condemn the students' action as unislamic. If, to their way of thinking, they were performing their "religious" duty, their so-called religion must be something very far removed from what we now understand by Islam.

Education: Key to all success

It is a widely accepted fact that present-day Muslims are faced with serious problems. It is also generally understood that the reason for this is the lack of leadership among the Muslims. But when we view this issue in the light of the facts, we come to realize that this is a totally baseless supposition. The actual problem besetting Muslims is not the lack of leadership but the failure to follow the right leadership. Many leaders capable of giving sound guidance have been born among Muslims, but the community has ignored their words of wisdom. When a community does not follow an inspired guide, how can it benefit from the leadership he offers?

Sir Syed Ahmad Khan (1817-1898) is one such example of a good leader, who gave clear guidance to his people, but who was not followed by the community as a whole – barring a handful of individuals. Later events testified to the validity and importance of his guidance, but his fellow Muslims, having dubbed him a *kafir* (infidel) and an enemy agent, were not at all inclined to give credence to his words. As such, they could not, and did not benefit from his advice.

In 1857, the Muslims waged a war against the British only to have a crushing defeat inflicted upon them. Not only did they fail to benefit in any way, but they also lost whatever had survived previous upheavals. As a community the Muslims found themselves in an utterly ravaged condition. At the time of this tragedy, Sir Syed, who witnessed all the horror of it with his own eyes, was already a mature man of forty. He remained deeply affected by what he had seen, and in 1869-70, decided to travel to England to inquire into the reasons for the continuing dominance of the west and the state of subjugation of the Muslims. During his stay, Sir Syed learnt that the Muslim predicament was traceable not to enemy plots but to their own shortcomings, not the least of which was their failure to keep up with the rest of the world in the field of modern education.

It became plain to Sir Syed that the modern age was one of scientific revolution, a revolution in which European nations had already marched ahead. The Muslims, on the contrary, were in such a sorry state of backwardness that they could not even enter this field.

When Sir Syed returned from England, he found Muslim religious scholars and intellectuals busily propagating the notion that the Muslims' real problem was political. That is, all their woes stemmed from the political dominance of the British, a dominance which would later be transferred to the Hindus. All Muslims were preoccupied with this thought and each was engaged in his own way in resolving the problem as if it were indeed political in nature.

Sir Syed was the first notability in modern India who pointed out that the Muslims' real problem was not political but educational. He therefore advised Muslims against actively joining in politics and urged

them to concentrate instead on education. (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, 1/369). This was the best possible guidance. But Muslims rejected this very proper advice. Instead of exerting themselves in the field of education, they persisted in political struggle. And when guidance goes unheeded, what benefit can accrue from it?

Let us compare this with developments in Japan. In 1945, Japan had an atom bomb dropped on it by the US, the latter country thus gaining political supremacy over it. Hirohito, who was at that time Emperor of Japan, consulted his country's intellectuals and military officers on what their course of action should now be. The majority of them were of the view that, although their air force had been destroyed, the army had emerged unscathed, which meant that the war could be continued until political supremacy was regained.

Hirohito was a wise and educated person. He maintained that there was no use in continuing political and military confrontation and that they should rather devote all their energies to the educational front. Peace was a prerequisite if this goal of education were to be achieved. Delivering a speech on the Japanese radio, Hirohito said: 'We have resolved to pave the way for a grand peace for all the generations to come by enduring the unendurable and suffering what is unsufferable.'

After initial differences, the entire nation heeded the guidance of Hirohito. According education supreme status, they started on a grand scale the struggle towards its acquisition. As a result, within a period of just forty years after the second world war, Japan has become the most educated society of the world, and in consequence, the most developed and aware society too. In 1945 Japan had become one of the weakest countries of the world. Today the world is compelled to acknowledge it as one of the most powerful. It has, in fact, become an economic superpower. And all this was achieved by dint of a 50-year struggle made in the right direction as advised by a right-thinking leader.

The advice to abandon political confrontation and to work hard in the field of education was given to the Japanese by Hirohito in 1945. Exactly the same advice was given by Sir Syed Ahmad Khan in undivided India to Indian Muslims 125 years before, in 1870. Yet the Japanese have now become a superpower, while Muslims are yet to become even a minipower.

The reason for this difference is not lack of leadership but failure to follow leadership. The Japanese accepted the direction given by their leader, paying full attention to the achievement of the goal he set them, but all Muslims could do was blame their leader. They rejected him on the score that his advice reeked of enemy plotting. The Muslims continued to seek their future in the field of politics, instead of seeking it in the field of education. And those who are today engaged in this futile exercise will meet the same fate as that of the previous Muslim generations.

This problem will be solved only if Muslims stop blaming others, refrain strictly from entering the arena of confrontation and fully engage themselves in the acquisition of education. Learning is the key to all kinds of success. It is the only ladder to all kinds of progress. With learning, all else follows: without learning there is much to lose.

Gerard of Cremona

Gerard, who was born in Cremona, Lombardy, in 1114, was a mediaeval scholar who translated the works of many major Greek and Arabic writers into Latin, there being a great body of scientific and philosophical literature in those languages which were well worth making available to all the known world at that time. In this sense, he performed the same service for his countrymen that Hunain Ibn Ishaaq had done for eastern Arabia. He went specially to Toledo, in Spain, to learn Arabic so that he could read the *Almagest* by Ptolemy, the Greek astronomer, geographer and mathematician who lived in the second century A.D. The *Almagest* was a vast computation of the astronomical knowledge of the ancients, and was accepted as authoritative up to the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. As such, this was one of Gerard's most significant translations. He was assisted in his task by two other scholars, one Christian and one Jewish. With this, and other such books, the gates of Greek and Arabic sciences were opened for the first time to the west. In the field of medicine, he translated books by Buqrat and Galen, almost all of the books by Hunain and Al-Kindi, Abdul Qasim Zuhra's book on surgery and many other books on the physical sciences, including the pamphlet on fossils which is attributed to Aristotle. Besides these, he rendered into Latin Avicenna's massive volume on law and many other books by Al-Kindi, Al-Farabi, Ishaaq and Thabit, etc.

In 1187, in Toledo, Gerard fell ill, and felt himself that his end was near. He wondered to himself what would happen when he was gone. "These books on Arabic are so precious," he thought, "and who is going to translate them into western languages?" His reflections moved him profoundly and he was fired with new zeal and energy. In spite of his rapidly failing health, he then succeeded in translating the remainder of his valuable collection of books. Legend has it that in the space of one month before his death, he had completed the translations of no less than 80 books.

When one feels sufficiently inspired to perform a task, one undertakes it at all costs, even on one's death bed, and even when one's external circumstances are totally adverse. It is one's will and one's motivation to work which are of prime importance. Health and strength are secondary.

Remembering God

Qays ibn Abu Hazim tells the story of how a leading Companion of the Prophet, Abdullah ibn Rawahah, fell sick towards the end of his life and lay with his head in the lap of his wife, weeping. When his wife saw his tears, she began to weep too. "Why are you crying?" he asked her. 'I saw you crying, and I felt like crying too,' she replied. Then he explained to her why he was crying. 'I remembered the words of Almighty God: "There is not one of you but shall approach the fire" (Qur'an, 19:71). I do not know if I will be saved from it or not' (Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir*, Vol III p. 132)

This touching episode clearly shows what in Islamic terminology is meant by *dikr* – remembrance of God. A mere repetition of words does not constitute *dikr*. Rather it is a feeling that wells up from the very depths of a man's soul, a spontaneous expression, of the joy and anguish that are kindled in his heart when he remembers his Lord.

When a person of true faith remembers God, he is overawed by the greatness of the Lord; he trembles at the thought of coming before Him in all His majesty. His emotion at this point involuntarily takes the form of words. Such is the nature of remembrance of God: It is reaction that sets in with tremendous force from within a man's heart when God enters therein. *Dikr* is the result of discovering God Himself; It can never come from the mindless parroting of a few words learned by rote.

The nature of belief

When the Prophet, may peace be upon him, and God's blessings, brought the message of Islam to the people of Mecca (the Quraysh), they did not find it acceptable. They could not understand how the religion of Muhammed could be true and that which they had inherited from their forebears false. Fired with the pride of their own religion, they said to the Prophet:

O Muhammad! Pray on our behalf to the Lord, who has revealed unto you whatever He has revealed, that He should send to us those forefathers of ours who have passed away. One of those whom He sends to us should be Qusayy bin Kilab, for he was a man of truth. We shall ask him whether what you say is true or false. If he confirms your truthfulness, we shall believe in you and shall thereby recognize your position before Almighty God; we shall then know that He has, indeed, made you a prophet, as you say. (*Seerat Ibn Hisham*).

How was it that the Quraysh understood the greatness of Qusayy bin Kilab, but not that of Muhammad ibn Abdullah? For no better reason than that Qusayy bin Kilab belonged to their past, while Mohammad ibn Abdullah was a man of their own times.

Right from early childhood they had been hearing about the greatness of Qusayy bin Kilab and it had thus become so fixed in their minds, that it seemed an incontrovertible fact. Muhammad ibn Abdullah, however, had come to them just as an ordinary man, with no legendary attainments, and it was this sole difference which, in their view, made the former great and the latter of no importance.

It is a very common phenomenon for people to accept, without hesitation, those already acknowledged as great before they themselves reached the age of discretion, and to reject those they have seen attaining greatness with their own eyes.

One factor which contributes to such a mentality is jealousy. It is the great men of today who become the objects of jealousy, never those of the past.

The Qu'ran lists one of the qualities of people of faith as being their capacity to "believe in the unseen." This verse is concerned directly with faith in God, but, indirectly, it also concerns belief in the Prophet. When a prophet comes to humanity, he is manifestly, a mortal human being. The fact that he assumes a physical form, walks around, eats food, enjoys victories, suffers defeats, and is periodically overwhelmed by adverse circumstances, would indeed appear to testify, to his being an ordinary human being. But there is a prophetic aspect of his life which is hidden from normal view; his being a recipient of God's grace is not something which is immediately apparent. Anyone can appreciate him in mortal guise, but it

is only those who have the capacity to recognize his unique, inner essence, who are able to grasp the fact that he is a prophet.

When a prophet says that he has seen Heaven and Hell, and claims that whoever follows him will be successful and that those who do not will be doomed to failure, he becomes to the ordinary man as 'invisible' as God Himself. In order to see a prophet as such, one must have the vision to see into the unseen, to recognize things from their inner truth. It is only those who can do so, who will pass the divine test,—who will believe in the Prophet and follow him.

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Knowledge is more than just information

Malik, ibn Anas said: "Knowledge is enlightenment. It comes only to a humble, fearing, pious heart."